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ABSTRACT

A discussion of issues in third-language instruction and language teacher training focuses on the situation in Finland, where a second and third language is required of all students and it is possible to study as many as six languages in addition to the native language. The Finnish school system is explained, noting that second and third languages are available to students in elementary and junior high schools. Because of the dual system of teaching credentials (general and subject-specialized), most second-language teachers are also third-language teachers. With regard to third-language learners, it is noted that in general, a great deal of transfer from second-language learning occurs. Possible fossilization of attitudes and strategies is also seen as a concern. Student choice of a third language, if not prescribed, can reflect fashions or political movements. In Finland, school third-language instruction is provided by non-native speakers, with the same potential for fossilization as with students and the additional disadvantage of teacher preferences and prejudices about the languages they speak and teach. Teacher training includes a practice teaching component. Finland's supply of good students motivated to become teachers is seen as adequate. (MSE)

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PRACTICAL ASPECTS IN L3 TEACHER TRAINING

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1. Background

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Rather than the term "teacher training", the concept of "teacher education" or "professional development for teachers" is introduced in current literature and preferred by many experts (see e.g. Richards and Nunan, 1990). I prefer to talk about teacher training in this connection because for active teachers, their entire careers involve professional development; in other words, their whole life is teacher education. For me, teacher training is a special period set aside for getting the necessary skills to be a good teacher. In most cases, this is a clear-cut, well-structured program for graduate students. The programs "typically include a knowledge base, drawn from linguistics and language learning theory, and a practical component, based on language teaching methodology and opportunity for practice teaching" (Richards, in Richards and Nunan, 1990, p.3). According to Richards, teacher trainees should study pedagogical grammar, discourse analysis, interlanguage syntax and phonology, curriculum and syllabus design and language testing, rather than phonetics and grammatical theory.

In most of the literature, no real difference is being made between second language, third language or foreign language teacher training. The discussion may touch such topics as how much more difficult it is to get authentic materials for the teaching of a foreign language. I have not found one single study that would have dealt with L3 teachers' problems. Now that the student-centered approach is a fashionable one, one would have thought that more attention would also have been paid to the learner of a third language.

I would like to begin by describing the situation in Finland, which is the basis for all of my observations. Secondly, I am going to deal with the problems faced by L3 learners, and finally I will discuss L3 teachers and their teacher training.

2. The situation in Finland

The inclusion of a third language in a school curriculum is preceded by extensive discussions and preparations. At least in Finland, the addition of any subject into the school system always involves a national and political decision taken by Parliament. For an officially bilingual country, a third language is a necessary educational component, and nowadays it is actually possible for a Finnish high school student to study up to six languages in addition to the mother tongue, four of which the student must begin to learn during the elementary and junior high school. From the Finnish point of view, the question of FL instruction was most recently answered in the seventies and confirmed again in 1992: now every Finn has to study at least two languages on top of the mother tongue. The extent (the number of hours and the number of terms), the curriculum and the goals of L3 instruction are centrally decided, and the whole school system abides by these decisions.

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LANGUAGES IN THE FINNISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

	1	
	2	
ELEMENTARY	3	LANGUAGE A
SCHOOL	4	
	5	(VOLUNTARY ENGLISH)
	6	
JUNIOR HIGH	7	LANGUAGE B
	8	LANGUAGE C (voluntary)
	9	

HIGH SCHOOL

	10	LANGUAGE D + D
	11	(optional)
	12	

The Finnish school system consists of a comprehensive school, obligatory for everybody. It lasts nine years, six of which are completed in the elementary school and the three last years in the junior high school. The three-year high school is not obligatory. In the chart, the languages are mentioned at the class level in which the students can start learning them and then continue till either the end of the junior high or the high school.

The only exceptions to the rule are some special schools (the French, German, English, International and Russian schools in Helsinki), the International Baccalaureat program in a couple of Finnish high schools, and experiments in content-based language teaching.

According to the law, there are two kinds of language teachers in the Finnish school system. 1) "Class teachers" (luokanopettajat) have a general educational background and teach in the 6 year elementary school. They hold the degree of filosofian kandidaatti, which is the equivalent of an M.A., with a major in Education. They do not have any real minors; however, they must take supporting subjects that cover a wide range from history and religion to maths and physical education. They can SPECIALIZE in a foreign language to teach it in the elementary school, where the first foreign or the second national language (Language A) comes in the third grade. 2) "Subject teachers" (aineenopettajat) have a regular M.A. with a major and two minors, two of which have to be subjects that are taught in the school system. This has led to the fact that in most tenure-track positions for language teachers, these two subjects are two languages. The only exceptions are teachers of Russian, classical languages (Latin and Greek) and the mother tongue--they only have to have one school subject in their degree. In other words, practically all second language teachers are also third language teachers. The most common combination of languages is Swedish and English. The third subject they study is often Education. If Education is not included in the Master of Art degree, then the teacher trainees have to add 40 study weeks of Education to their studies later on. (One study week is the Finnish equivalent for a credit, and one study week should stand for 40 hours of student work including both classroom attendance and homework.)

The M.A. curriculum in Education includes the following components:
1) 12 study weeks of Education
2) 9 study weeks of FL Didactics
3) 18 study weeks of practice teaching
4) 1 study week of the student's choice
40
Education courses include areas like Philosophical and Social Foundations of Education, History of Education etc.

Teacher training for language "subject teachers" takes place for an academic year in normal schools that are attached to the university teacher training institutes. If a teacher trainee does not have at least four months' experience in teaching, the trainee has to do "field teaching", i.e. teach thirty hours in the language at some school in the middle of the training period (January).

All teacher trainees have to practice teach in elementary, junior high and high school levels at the school system, and their lessons are observed and evaluated by the teacher trainers and other trainees.

Teacher training differs slightly locally. In Helsinki, every potential teacher trainee has to take an aptitude test. The test is an interview, and its purpose is to screen out those not suited to be teachers. As the Ministry of Education is situated in Helsinki, one component of the teacher training program is a one-year course on school legislation offered by Ministry of Education personnel. Passing the final examination of this course is

among the formal qualifications for a tenure-track position within the school system.

The degree curricula of most of the University of Helsinki language majors contain a lot of philology and literature rather than applied linguistics or English, German, French etc. as a Foreign Language. That is why the component of Foreign Language Didactics, offered in the Department of Education, is important. The teacher training period features all kinds of seminars with the teacher trainers. In addition, other sessions offer a forum for more open discussions on methodology and other important issues.

3. Learners

No L3 language learner is a tabula rasa, an empty slate. Whatever the second language has been and however much or little the learner learned, it will influence the study of a third language. A comparative study, carried out in 1990 by Professor Henry Fullenwider at the University of Kansas and the author at the University of Helsinki, showed that there was strong affective influence in almost all cases, even though the learners of L3 would have felt they did not really know their L2.

The motivation to study a third language can come totally from the outside, if a language requirement is involved. But especially in the beginning, the students reflect their past experiences in language learning on the study of a new language. Previous success or failure molds the attitude towards the new language.

A great deal of transfer takes place. Even if L2 and L3 are very different, language learning strategies are transferred, consciously or unconsciously. One American student in our study, who had studied first Chinese and now was taking a first-year German course, mentioned that the only thing he had learned from studying another language before was how to (or at least try to) study a language. If L3 is related to the student's L2, then there is a lot of language transfer, too. Cognates and false friends are a good point to discuss in class. More theoretically oriented students enjoy talking about similarities and differences between their L2 and L3; but the discussion may be pedagogically unproductive if the students do not have the same L2.

The negative side of the transfer is the possible fossilization of attitudes and strategies--"Oh, I know that," a student might say, "but because it never worked with Language A it cannot work with Language B either." Mistakes can also become fossilized across languages, though then the origin of fossilization may also be the mother tongue. A good example of this is a Finnish pupil who never uses any articles in any of his second and foreign languages. However, this clearly fossilized mistake across the languages may be due to the fact that Finnish has no articles.

In choosing a third language, student attitudes can reflect fashions or political movements in the country. During the sixties and seventies, Russian was a rather popular third language in Finland. Now the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs is having difficulty in finding future employees who have studied at least some Russian. In other words, if the third language is not a set language, its demand may fluctuate, resulting in unemployment for certain teachers. If, on the other hand, the choice of the third language is predetermined, it may become very unpopular, and the students may have to be motivated by the teacher to study. This has happened with Swedish in Finland. It is actually the second national language, spoken by 6% of the population, but it comes to more than 90% of the school children as their third language. It has been publicly called "pakkoruotsi" or "straitjacket Swedish."

4. L3 teacher and teacher training

In Finland, at least, L3 instruction at the primary and secondary level is provided by non-native speakers. This means that what has been said about L3 students applies to a certain extent to the teachers, too, for whom the language is also an L3. This is not so problematic if there are enough lessons in that particular language in that particular school--the teacher can concentrate on one language only. If, as so often in smaller schools in Finland, the teacher has to teach two languages and give lessons in both on the same day, then there are more problems. Can a native speaker of Finnish who is an EFL teacher change into a Swedish teacher during a 10-minute break?

How about the teacher's own language preferences, prejudices and skills? Can we be equally good all the time in three languages? Do the teachers have time to follow the literature and the print media in several languages, and will they be equally expert on the cultures of these countries? The answer is NO...--teachers are human beings, too. But they have to be conscious of their preferences and shortcomings. The teachers also have to pay attention to the students' results: in both L2 and L3, the students have to be doing about equally well in national tests.

While learning about the school system, the teacher trainees find out about the quantity and quality of the L3 instruction they are involved in. In discussions with their trainers and other professionals in their field, the questions of the allocation of time and how to reach the given goals are bound to come up. These are the best circles to discuss materials, resources etc. Therefore, the more contact there is between future and practising L3 teachers, the better.

Every teacher training program has a practice teaching component. We still do not know what exactly makes the best teacher, we just know of many factors that play a role. We do know that teaching has to be learned by 1) observing lessons, 2) analysing and evaluating lessons and 3) teaching oneself. Observation and analysis of several lessons should precede teaching. Usually, there are so many trainees in a program that each gets to teach a certain number of lessons, but never as much as a week's load of a regular L3 teacher's program in one stretch. Though detailed analysis of individual lessons is very valuable, the trainee should be faced with an entire day or week, with complete and authentic

responsibility for what the pupils should learn. Teacher training should be as close to real life as possible.

Finland is one of many countries which are fortunate to have good students who are interested in becoming teachers. That is true of future L3 instructors, too. Therefore, theoretical studies are no problem. Good students pose a challenge to the trainer. Are the trainers fossilized in their thinking of what teacher training should be? Are they marketing only certain methods because of their own background? Are their ideas of a good lesson convincing? Rather than believing that trainees would have time to do research, I advocate very open discussions and unprejudiced attitudes.

To describe a good teacher training curriculum, I would like to use an African proverb:" Rather than giving a hungry man a fish, give him a net and teach him to use it." The net could be, for example, good professional contacts, information about teaching and research materials, AND self-monitoring. Self-monitoring can be practiced during the training program, and it may prove very handy if one has to work alone rather than in a team. Also there have to be regular times for L3 teachers to gather together. Continuing or further education is necessary both for language skills and for professional interests as a teacher.

"Teacher training programs should mark the beginning--not the end--of professional development" (Richards, 1990, p.119).

Postlude:

Though I have not discussed the recent teaching technology, the use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning in classrooms, I have been talking about teacher training in an ideal situation. Political and social situations change, and it is usually the teachers who have to deal with those problems soon after they have arisen. I have not taken into account the problems faced by teachers in areas of social and political unrest. The real presence of fear and violence must affect schools. Therefore, I wish peace to all teachers in Israel so that they can continue to achieve very good results in school. Heveinu shalom alechem!

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